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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S DECEMBER 21 LUNCH MEETING WITH VICE
FOREIGN MINISTER YABUNAKA

Classified By: DCM James P. Zumwalt per reasons 1.5(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The ROKG sees hints of movement from the DPRK but that it will not offer any inducements to the DPRK without meaningful action from the North Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka told the Ambassador on December 21. Foreign Minister Okada's upcoming travel abroad will include stops in Russia, Turkey, and Burma as well as a possible January Washington trip. Yabunaka himself would plan to travel to Washington in advance of an Okada visit. On Futenma replacement and alliance management, Prime Minister Hatoyama confirmed to Secretary Clinton in Copenhagen that the current Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) plan would be the fallback if no other alternatives are found. Yabunaka also expressed his view that informal U.S.-Japan dialogue would be preferable to a more formal structure during this time of political transition and uncertainty. Yabunaka opined that Prime Minister Hatoyama keeps his own counsel on some issues and that reticence to express his own views with advisors can create false impressions. Nonetheless, Yabunaka is optimistic regarding the U.S.-Japan alliance, noting that public support remains strong, adding that media outreach could be effective in persuading and informing both the media and public. Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) Chairman Ichiro Ozawa's role in policy formation remains unclear but Ozawa is well aware of the impression that he wields great influence. Yabunaka confirmed that Japan would deliver a strong message to Iran during the visit of Supreme Council for National Security Secretary General Seed Jalili. End Summary.

Yabunaka Travel to Korea

¶2. (C) Yabunaka reported on his weekend trip to South Korea's Cheju Island for meetings with his ROKG counterpart. The ROKG believes that there are hints of movement by the DPRK but will not respond absent meaningful action from the DPRK to address the nuclear issue. Yabunaka noted that this stance was a change from the government of former President Roh Moo-hyun, which Yabunaka suggested would have been more forward-leaning in responding to hints of a thaw in progress with the DPRK.

¶3. (C) Yabunaka said he had been frank with his ROK counterpart in discussing the broader aspects of the U.S.-Japan alliance, including the current domestic political

situation in Japan surrounding the new DPJ-led government, political dynamics, and the debate over Futenma replacement and the realignment road map. Yabunaka added that the ROK had undergone similar domestic political turmoil in 2003 in the transition from President Kim Dae-jung's administration to that of Roh. Yabunaka said the ROKG understood the ""seriousness and the urgency"" presently surrounding U.S.-Japan alliance management but stopped short of saying the ROKG was ""concerned.”

Foreign Minister Travel

14. (C) Foreign Minister Okada will be traveling extensively in late December and early January. He will travel to Russia, Turkey, and Burma. He would like to meet with the Secretary in January. Yabunaka proposed that he travel to Washington himself the first week of January to meet with the Deputy Secretary and prepare for Okada's trip.

Hatoyama Confirms FRF as Fallback

15. (C) Yabunaka said Prime Minister Hatoyama confirmed to the Secretary in Copenhagen that if the GOJ review of FRF alternatives to Henoko did not yield viable proposals, the GOJ would return to the 2006 FRF agreement. Recent newspaper reports characterizing Hatoyama's discussion with the Secretary had been inaccurate, he stressed.

Informal Dialogue Preferable

16. (C) Regarding the shape of U.S.-Japan consultations on alliance issues over the coming months, Yabunaka suggested

that an informal dialogue would likely be preferable to a more formal structure such as a two-plus-two. He noted that informal meetings could allow political leaders on both sides to reach basic understandings on key issues, review overall security strategy in East Asia, and demonstrate the new government's seriousness on security matters. Given a sometimes steep learning curve faced by some DPJ leaders on the details and rationale behind U.S.-Japan security policy, a formal structure could be more risky as the Hatoyama administration and/or ruling coalition political leaders could take positions based on incomplete or erroneous understandings of alliance issues and options. An informal process could be an opportunity to educate leaders over the course of the next year, with an eye toward the President's November 2010 visit to Japan. The President's visit would be an opportunity to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the alliance in a more positive atmosphere, having laid the groundwork through close consultations during the course of the year.

Assessing Hatoyama on Security Issues

17. (C) Yabunaka noted that the Prime Minister's advisors had a variety of views but that their private advice to him remained private. Hatoyama's own views are sometimes difficult to read. With the Prime Minister often offering little in the way of comments that challenge a policy view or analysis, Hatoyama advisors are sometimes left with the impression that he has agreed or accepted a particular position when, in fact, he has not. This tendency toward reticence contributes to some ambiguity and confusion regarding the Prime Minister's views. Yabunaka said it would be beneficial for the U.S. to go through the basic fundamentals of security issues with the Prime Minister, noting that engagement with China and others has its place, but that the U.S. and Japan had to provide a foundation for security as well. He added that it was important to impress upon Hatoyama that strong U.S.-Japan relations did not have an indefinite ""shelf life"" and that the Hatoyama administration could not simply set the alliance aside in favor of domestic politics without consequences. The alliance needs continued care and nurturing.

Cause For Optimism

¶8. (C) In terms of educating DPJ policymakers regarding the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance, Yabunaka said that he was optimistic, citing Foreign Minister Okada's deeper understanding of security issues since assuming office. Moreover, recent public opinion polls indicated that 65 percent of the Japanese public supports the U.S.-Japan alliance. Message and messenger were also important as well, he added. For example, Secretary Gates, direct style in addressing Futenma during his October visit had not played well in Japan. On the other hand, President Obama is very popular among Japanese, and that popularity could be leveraged in promoting the alliance.

Media and Public Outreach

¶9. (C) Despite public support for the alliance in principle, Yabunaka said that neither the general public nor some in the media understand security issues very well. He added that newspaper editorialists and the business community have a reasonably good understanding of the issues but that television commentators and politicians did not have as strong a grasp of security issues. Efforts to educate the latter group could be worthwhile, he added. In particular, he cited the examples of several influential and popular television commentators who might respond well to outreach.

Ozawa Role

¶10. (C) Although DPJ Chairman Ozawa's role in decision-making by the Hatoyama government remains somewhat unclear, Yabunaka said that Ozawa's worldview is clear and well-defined. The notion that Japan only obeyed the wishes

of the United States was deeply ingrained in Ozawa's mind Yabunaka said. Noting Ozawa's recent trip to China along with some 650 DPJ members, he said that Ozawa had been disturbed that the trip had been cast as if he had been ""paying tribute to China." Yabunaka said Ozawa's inability to foresee how such a trip would be portrayed in the media reflected Ozawa's occasional shortcomings in managing his message. That said, Ozawa is aware of his perceived role as the hidden power in the DPJ, reportedly telling PM Hatoyama that if he were to become involved in the Futenma issue, the media would portray Ozawa as dictating the DPJ position.

Iran

¶11. (S) In response to a query from the DCM, Yabunaka confirmed that Japan would deliver a strong message to visiting Iranian Supreme Council for National Security Secretary General Saeed Jalili that Iran should return to negotiations and respond positively to the P5 plus 1 proposal. Yabunaka noted that Deputy Foreign Minister Kenichiro Sasae had breakfast with Jalili that morning and that he and Foreign Minister Okada would be delivering a consistent, clear message to Iran that it must meet its obligations. Yabunaka also said Japan would express its willingness to host P5 plus 1 discussions with Iran if that would facilitate progress.

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